



White Pine 2025 Nominee List – Annotations and Content



Gorgeous Gruesome Faces

Written by Linda Cheng

Published by MacMillan Press

Two years have passed since Sunny Lee lost her best friend Mina in a mysterious death. With their other BFF, Candie, the trio had been the hottest up-and-coming teen pop group, until it all suddenly ended. And Sunny can't help but wonder if Candie had something to do with it.

Now, Sunny is still seeking answers. When she discovers that Candie is attending a new K-pop workshop, Sunny follows, hoping to uncover the reason why Mina died... and why she died so violently. Sunny and Candie's reunion is haunted by more than Mina's death as the old spark between them returns, even stronger than before. But there's no time for romance when the lines between nightmare and reality start to blur, leaving their competitors' bodies bizarrely maimed and mutilated. To survive, Sunny must expose the dark secrets surrounding Candie and the workshop's twisted promise for fame.

Stitched with cutting commentary on the ugly side of stardom and impossible beauty standards, Linda Cheng's mind-bending, feminist thriller will have readers screaming and swooning for more.

Content/Discussion Themes

K-pop, idols, Hollywood, horror, psychological distress, mind control, gender and sexuality, revenge, friendship, body horror, grief, trauma, death, pressure in sexual situations, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, scandal, depression, religion, family pressure, body image, suicide, girls being socially punished for boys' bad behaviour/double standards

Little Moons

Written by Jen Storm

Illustrated by Ryan Howe, Nickolej Villiger, and Alice RL

Published by Highwater Press

In this moving graphic novel, thirteen-year-old Reanna grieves the loss of her older sister. Can she find comfort through her family's Ojibwe traditions? It's been a year since Reanna's sister, Chelsea, went missing on her way home from school. Without any idea of what happened, Reanna and her family struggle to find closure.

Driven from her home by memories, Reanna's mom moves to the big city. Left behind on the reserve, Reanna and her little brother go to live with their dad. Reanna is hurt and angry that her mom has run away. She feels lonely and abandoned...but she is not alone. Lights turn on in empty rooms, and objects move without being touched.

There are little moons everywhere.

Content/Discussion Themes

Paranormal, Death & Dying, Siblings, MMIWG2S, Prejudice and Racism, Social Emotional Learning, Death, Grief, and Bereavement, Indigenous Cultures, Strong Female Characters, Abandonment

Lockjaw

Written by Matteo Cerilli

Published by Tundra Books

Chuck Warren died tragically at the old abandoned mill, but Paz Espino knows it was no accident — there's a monster under the town, and she's determined to kill it before anyone else gets hurt. She'll need the help of her crew — inseparable friends, bound by a childhood pact stronger than diamonds, distance or death — to hunt it down. But she's up against a greater force of evil than she ever could have imagined.

With shifting timeframes and multiple perspectives, *Lockjaw* is a small-town ghost story, where monsters living and dead haunt the streets, the homes and the minds of the inhabitants. For readers of *Wilder Girls* and *The Haunted*, this trans YA horror book by an incredible debut author will grab you and never let you go.

Content/Discussion Themes

LGBTQIA+, small town, family relationships, found family, friendships, grief and loss, multiple narrators, revenge, gender and sexuality, identity, horror, systemic injustice, racial discrimination, underage drinking, homophobia, transphobia, police profiling and abuse of power, bullying, violence, death of friend, death of sibling

Pillow Talk

Written by Stephanie Cooke

Illustrated by Mel Valentine Vargas

Published by HarperCollins

When college freshman Grace Mendes reluctantly attends her first pillow fight match, she falls in love with the surprisingly gritty sport.

Despite her usually shy, introverted, and reserved nature, Grace decides to try out for the Pillow Fight Federation (PFF), a locally famous league of fighters with larger-than-life personas like Pain Eyre, Miss Fortune, and champion Kat Atonic. They may battle with pillows, but there is nothing soft about these fighters. The first and only rule to pillow fighting is that the pillow needs to be the first point of contact; after that, everything else goes.

Grace struggles with deep-seated body image issues, so she is especially shocked when she makes the competitive league and is welcomed into the fold of close knit, confident fighters. As her first official fight performing as newly crafted alter-ego/ring persona Cinderhella looms on the horizon, the real battle taking place is between Grace and her growing insecurities. What if people laugh or make fun of her? Why did she think she could pillow fight in the first place when she doesn't look like your "typical" athlete?

Turns out, no one is laughing when Cinderhella dominates her first match in the ring. And as her alter-ego rises through the ranks of the PFF, gaining traction and online fame (and online trolls), can Grace use the spotlight to become an icon for not just others, but most importantly, for herself?

Pillow Talk is an inclusive, high-octane, outrageously fun graphic novel that aims a punch at the impossibly high standards set for women in sports (and otherwise) and champions the power of finding a team that will, quite literally, fight for you. A knock-out!

Content/Discussion Themes

Body image, LGBTQIA characters, mild/medium violence, extreme sport, coming of age, anxiety, friendship, coming of age, bullying, fat phobia

The Space Between Here and Now

Written by Sarah Suk

Published by HarperCollins

Seventeen-year-old Aimee Roh has Sensory Time Warp Syndrome, a rare condition that causes her to time travel to a moment in her life when she smells something linked to that memory. Her dad is convinced she'll simply grow out of it if she tries hard enough, but Aimee's fear of vanishing at random has kept her from living a normal life.

When Aimee disappears for nine hours into a memory of her estranged mom—a moment Aimee has never remembered before—she becomes distraught. Not only was this her longest disappearance yet, but the memory doesn't match up with the story of how her mom left—at least, not the version she's always heard from her dad.

Desperate for answers, Aimee travels to Korea, where she unravels the mystery of her memories, the truth about her mother, and the reason she keeps returning to certain moments in her life. Along the way, she realizes she'll need to reconcile her past in order to save her present.

Content/Discussion Themes

Youth, Young Women, Coming of Age, Resilience, Relationships, Family, Family Relationships, Friends, Determination, Parental Abandonment, Grief, Identity, Science Fiction, Contemporary, Time Travel, Korean Culture, Depression, Anxiety

Sweetness in the Skin

Written by Ishi Robinson

Published by HarperCollins

Pumkin Patterson is a thirteen-year-old girl living in a tiny two-room house in Kingston, Jamaica, with her grandmother (who wants to improve the family's social standing), her Aunt Sophie (who dreams of a new life in Paris for her and Pumkin), and her mother Paulette (who's rarely home).

When Sophie is offered the chance to move to France for work, she seizes the opportunity, and promises to send for her niece in one year's time. All Pumkin has to do is pass her French

entrance exam so she can attend school there. But when Pumkin's grandmother dies, she's left alone with her volatile mother, and as soon as her estranged father turns up—as lazy and conniving as ever—the household's fortunes take a turn for the worse.

Pumkin must somehow find a way to raise the money for her French exam, so she can free herself from her household and reunite with her beloved aunt in France. In a moment of ingenuity, she turns her passion for baking into a true business. Making batches of sweet potato pudding, coconut drops and chocolate cakes, Pumkin develops a booming trade—but when her school and her mother find out what she's up to, everything she's worked so hard for may slip through her fingers. . . .

Sweetness in the Skin is a funny and heartbreaking story about a young girl figuring out who she is, what she is capable of—and where she truly belongs.

Content/Discussion Themes

Youth, Jamaican Youth, Young Women, Violence, Jamaican Culture, Coming of Age, Resilience, Relationships, Family, Friends, Poverty, Bullying, Determination, Social Status and Stigma, Parental Abandonment, Baking, Abuse, Bullying

Takedown

Written by Ali Bryan

Published by DCB

Sixteen-year-old star wrestler Rowan Harper's biggest fan is her father.

But he has ALS, and his symptoms are getting worse. Saving his life will cost more money than the family has, but Rowan finds a solution. Will she risk her chances at a scholarship by competing in a lucrative, but illegal, underground MMA fight?

Takedown is a high-intensity coming-of-age story about family illness and competitive combat, with lots of heart, hope, and headlocks.

Content/Discussion Themes

Strong female character, grief, MMA, Wrestling, use of drugs, extreme sport, violence

Where the Dark Stands Still

Written by A.B. Poranek

Published by Margaret K. McElderry Books

Liska knows that magic is monstrous, and its practitioners are monsters. She has done everything possible to suppress her own magic, to disastrous consequences. Desperate to be free of it, Liska flees her small village and delves into the dangerous, demon-inhabited spirit-wood to steal a mythical fern flower. If she plucks it, she can use its one wish to banish her powers. Everyone who has sought the fern flower has fallen prey to unknown horrors, so when Liska is caught by the demon warden of the wood—called The Leszy—a bargain seems better than death: one year of servitude in exchange for the fern flower and its wish.

Whisked away to The Leszy's crumbling manor, Liska soon makes an unsettling discovery: she is not the first person to strike this bargain, and all her predecessors have mysteriously vanished. If Liska wants to survive the year and return home, she must unravel her taciturn host's spool of secrets and face the ghosts—figurative and literal—of his past. Because something wakes in the woods, something deadly and without mercy. It frightens even The Leszy...and cannot be defeated unless Liska embraces the monster she's always feared becoming.

Content/Discussion Themes

Fantasy, Folklore, Gothic, Romance between a 700 year old demon and a 17 year old girl

Who We Are in Real Life

Written by Victoria Koops

Published by Groundwood Press

IRL, Darcy has just moved to the small prairie town of Unity Creek with her two moms. It feels like she left everything good behind in the city. She misses her tabletop gaming friends and her boyfriend — and is horrified by the homophobia her family faces in their new home. Then she meets kind, quiet Art, who invites her to join his *Dungeons & Dragons* game.

Art is mostly happy fading into the background at school and only really coming alive during his friends' weekly *D&D* game — until meeting Darcy pulls his life off-course in wonderful and alarming ways. Suddenly he has something worth fighting for. But what if that something puts him in conflict with his father, an influential and conservative figure in their town? Can Art stand up against his father's efforts to prevent Darcy and her friends from starting a queer-straight alliance at school?

Meanwhile, in game, Darcy's and Art's *D&D* characters join forces to fight corruption as they grow closer in the homebrew world of Durgeon's Keep — as fantasy and reality collide.

Content/Discussion Themes

LGBTQIA+, gender and sexuality, identity, small town, coming of age, family relationships, romance and romantic relationships, dual narrators, tabletop gaming, *Dungeons and Dragons*, fantasy world depicted alongside real world story events, physical and sexual harassment and intimidation, emotionally abusive relationship, hate speech and crimes; death of mother (pre-story), Homophobia

Zombie Apocalypse Running Club

Written by Carrie Mac

Published by Crown Books

Eira and Soren are queer twins living with their survivalist parents when a plague starts spreading that turns people into zombie-like monsters. They disagree with their parents about a lot, but they can't deny that their way of life keeps them safe while much of the world perishes—for now. When it becomes clear that their safety won't last, the twins decide to strike out on their own.

They don't get far before encountering the one remaining person in the closest town: their friend Racer, a gold medal-winning Special Olympics champion. Racer is appalled at the twins' slow speed and tells them that their survivalist skills aren't worth anything if they can't outrun the monsters. He sets them on a training regimen that comes in handy when they embark on the bigger journey ahead of them.

On their trek they find friends, enemies, and even love. But with zombies on their heels at every turn, will they ever be able to slow down?

Content/Discussion Themes

Dystopian, LGBTQ, Horror, Adventure, science fiction, unaccepting family, some gore, religious beliefs, ultra conservatism, homophobia, wokeness, disability